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E A S T T.I M O R

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Mr Chairman and Expert Members

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Sub-Commission on the question of East Timor, which some observers believe to be one of the most serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in any part of the world, with particular reference to colonial and other dependent countries and territories--the present item on the agenda,.

The number of people killed in East Timor since 1975 approaches genocidal proportions, and the world should be particularly shocked about reported atrocities against civilians.

Given that Portugal, the administering power, is no longer able to discharge its responsibilities in East Timor, the UN has a special responsibility in this case.

To introduce myself, I was the Reuters correspondent in East Timor from September to December 1975. During that time, I witnessed the first attacks on the former Portuguese colony by Indonesian troops, and came to know East Timorese political leaders. I was evacuated from Timor shortly before Indonesian troops landed in Dili, the capital. I have since maintained close contacts with the Timorese refugee community abroad and have written a book describing East Timor's aspirations for independence.

The Minority Rights Group, for whom I speak, will next month publish a report on East Timor, and the situation in neighbouring West Irian.

East Timor has a long tradition of struggle against colonialism. It was first colonised by a European power in the 15th century, and through four centuries the Timorese have resisted Portuguese rule. In 1974 the Portuguese revolution raised great hopes for independence among the East Timorese.

Three political parties were then formed: FRETILIN (the Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor), which wanted immediate independence, UDT (the Timorese Democratic Union), which also wanted independence, but after a long transitional period, and APODETI (Association for the Integration of Timor with Indonesia), which advocated union with Indonesia. Independent foreign observers in East Timor in 1974 and 1975 estimate that between them FRETILIN and UDT commanded the support of 90% of the population. APODETI was an unpopular minority party.

Unhappily for the East Timorese, a campaign of destabilisation by Indonesia (conducted through APODETI) and constant government crises in Portugal did not allow Portugal to supervise an orderly decolonisation, as promised.

In August 1975 the UDT party staged a coup d'etat which led to the outbreak of civil war and the withdrawal of the Portuguese administration. The civil war lasted three weeks, during which FRETILIN rallied popular support and defeated the UDT party, whose leaders fled over the border into Indonesian Timor, along with thousands of refugees. Some 3,000 people had died in the fighting.

FRETILIN did not, as might be expected, declare independence. Aware of the sensitive political situation, and of statements by Indonesian political leaders that they would not tolerate an independent

East Timor, they called for the Portuguese government to return. However, three months of attempted negotiations were fruitless, due to Portuguese passivity and Indonesian interference.

I entered East Timor at this time, with many other foreign correspondents. We travelled extensively through the country, by now totally at peace and striving to reconstruct a civil administration.

The peace was broken by the first incursion of Indonesian troops over the border, on September 14. From September to November these attacks intensified, until by mid-November Indonesia was regularly bombing border towns by sea and air. Troops used were Indonesian regulars--not, as the Indonesian government claimed, Timorese from the UDT and APODETI parties, who sometimes acted as carriers for Indonesian soldiers.

On November 28, faced with a serious military emergency, and little hope of negotiations with the Portuguese government, FRETILIN declared independence in the hope that as a sovereign nation East Timor might have more hope of being heard in the international arena.

Nine days later, Indonesia launched a full-scale invasion of East Timor, landing paratroopers in the capital.

Mr Chairman

Since that day, December 7, 1975, East Timor has been effectively sealed off from the outside world. Foreign observers do not have free access to the territory, nor does International Red Cross.

The evidence I will now present has been gathered from Timorese who have managed to flee the country, from letters smuggled out of Timor, and in some cases from Indonesian government sources. In most cases it has been given in confidence.

The landing in Dili can only be described as a bloodbath. In the first two days mass executions of those accused of offering resistance took place on Dili wharf, some before the assembled population. In the nearby village of Maubara the entire male Chinese population--around 25 to 30 men--was lined up and shot. There are witnesses to these executions in Portugal today.

Only two months after the invasion observers of the war in Timor were shocked by a statement from a leader of the Indonesian-installed Provisional Government in Dili that 60,000 of East Timor's population of 650,000 may have died in the fighting. In late 1976 a report from Catholic Relief sources in East Timor claimed that the death toll could be 100,000. In late 1978 an Indonesian government official stated confidentially that he thought the figure may be even double that, taking into account that many people had simply 'disappeared without trace'. To enter into such a numbers game is, of course, risky. There are various reasons why the last census taken by the Portuguese government cannot be regarded as reliable, and there is little likelihood of a reliable census being conducted by the Indonesian government in the immediate future. It is enough to say that there is overwhelming evidence that a considerable proportion of the population has died as the direct result of the Indonesian

invasion. The deaths continue today, and will continue, unless bodies like this sub-commission take action.

For the four years since the invasion, FRETILIN forces have waged armed resistance throughout East Timor. Until late last year they maintained radio contact with supporters in Australia.

In September 1977 a French journalist managed to enter East Timor illegally and penetrate FRETILIN lines. Denis Reichle reported that Indonesian troops were 'systematically wiping out' the populations of villages suspected of supporting FRETILIN. He said that FRETILIN leaders he interviewed were 'near starvation', but told him they would rather die fighting than submit to what they considered Indonesian slavery.

During 1978 FRETILIN suffered severe setbacks. Indonesian policy combined new military offensives with attempts to politically divide the leadership. As a result the population in liberated zones was forced to constant flight. They could no longer tend crops, and many resistance fighters were forced to surrender by lack of ammunition, medicines, food and clothing. Indonesian policy towards those who surrendered aggravated the crisis. Villagers were herded into camps which increased the strain on food resources. Badly-needed medical aid was not available, due largely to government corruption.

Mr Chairman

These centres deserve close attention. They have been variously described as concentration camps, strategic hamlets or internment camps. Two eyewitnesses have thrown light on their nature. The first is an Indonesian official opposed to the war:

> Theoretically, the people in these centres are supposed to return to their villages after receiving assistance, but the problem is there are often no villages to return to--they have been completely burnt, wiped off the face of the earth...Indonesia has a policy of keeping people in urban areas.

The second witness is Father Leoneto de Rego, a Portuguese priest who spent three years in the mountains with FRETILIN before surrendering to Indonesian authorities early this year. He is now in Portugal, and his valuable account of the present situation in East Timor will be presented in more detail below. He claims that travel is prohibited from these centres:

> After people surrender, the Indonesians concentrate them in town centres, where they cannot leave. This creates great difficulties of hunger at these sites, because local food supplies cannot feed such numbers, and so there is starvation and old people and others of a certain age die of hunger.

In September 1978 the Indonesian government staged a highly cynical public relations exercise. A group of foreign ambassadors and journalists accompanied the Indonesian foreign minister on an inspection of a camp

at Remexio, 35 kms from Dili. They were shocked to see four thousand war refugees suffering from malnutrition, some near death. The point of their tour was an Indonesian government request for humanitarian aid which carried, according to Richard Gill of the Melbourne Herald, the proviso that donors should recognise Indonesian sovereignty in East Timor. Apart from the politicisation of a request for aid for war victims, there is strong evidence that such aid rarely reaches those for whom it is intended, due to Indonesian government corruption.

Mr Chairman

It seems self-evident that only International Red Cross, which has until now been denied full access to East Timor since 1975, is capable of impartially distributing aid to the distressed population of East Timor. I believe that the Indonesian government has finally agreed to admit an International Red Cross mission, a decision which must be welcomed.

A Timorese refugee in Portugal recently drew attention to information he had received from family in Timor that between twenty and thirty FRETILIN fighters who surrendered in the south coast town of Viqueque were late executed in nearby Ossu prison. There is further evidence that, despite an amnesty for FRETILIN supporters proclaimed in 1978, there is no attempt to extend clemency to those who surrender, and many have been executed. In a territory sealed off from the world's scrutiny, there is no restraining hand.

The most reliable evidence available of the current situation in East Timor comes from Father de Rego.

He is a 63-year-old Salesian priest who taught at a mission school in the south coast region of Soibada. When the Indonesian army first attacked Soibada in July 1976, he fled to the mountains with FRETILIN and many other villagers. He has verified FRETILIN claims that during 1976 and 1977, while Indonesia was claiming total control of East Timor, most of the population were behind FRETILIN lines. He has described a civil administration which existed there: schools, hospitals and local bazaars functioned as normal. Crops were grown. FRETILIN government meetings were held. The Timorese escudo circulated in liberated areas, asvopposed to Indonesian currency. Father de Rego regularly said mass behind FRETILIN lines, and denies Indonesian claims that FRETILIN is Communist. FRETILIN fortunes changed, he said, in late 1977 when Indonesian planes bombed their central military command. Intensified attacks created the famine conditions I have already described. He testified that FRETILIN has fought since 1975 without outside assistance

of any kind, but in the hope that international awareness of their plight would eventually lead to relief.

Asked about claims that 200,000 people might have died, he replied that he could not estimate because he only had knowledge of the areas he travelled. However, he believes that around one third of the people in his area have died since the onset of the war, the majority from starvation, others from war wounds. He stressed that the food situation in his area was better than in others.

Father de Rego surrendered at the beginning of this year, near death from starvation and malaria.

He was subsequently imprisoned in Baucau, and here I should point out that information about prisons has been extremely difficult to obtain. He was interrogated five times by Indonesian security police, but not beaten or tortured. He was given half a mug of cooked rice per day. He said there were hundreds of Timorese imprisoned here, and although he never witnessed torture or beatings, he had been told these occurred. He was allowed to leave East Timor in June. He said that at that time the resistance was greatly reduced, but was still continuing. He feels that even if the current resistance is extinguished, a new resistance will take its place, because the population will never accept Indonesian rule. To use his own words, 'a whole generation of Timorese youth has been wiped out, including the cream of our youth,--teachers, students, the educated class'.

Mr Chairman

The General Assembly and the Security Council of the United Nations still have before them resolutions calling for the withdrawal of Indonesian troops from East Timor and a genuine act of self-determination

An attempt to implement these resolutions in early 1976 by sending a fact-finding mission to East Timor failed due to the inability of the special envoy, Mr Winspeare Guicciardi, to contact FRETILIN leaders. New attempts must be made to gain access to all areas of East Timor, to investigate atrocity allegations and to provide a check on Indonesian activities.

The Indonesian government hopes, and the East Timorese fear, that the issue will fade from world attention. There is, as I hope I have demonstrated, much evidence available on human rights violations. Yet it is a synptom of the world's unconcern that no government or international body has systematically interviewed Timorese refugees in Portugal who can document these violations.

The UN is only as effective as its member states allow it to be.

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Several nations have recently sold arms to Indonesia which reinforc its war effort in Timor,--in particular Australia, Holland, France, the United States and Great Britain. Father de Rego reported that Indonesian bombing efficiency increased soon after the war began when jet bombers came into use. I assume the aircraft to which he refers are the OV-10 Broncos which were delivered to Indonesia by the U.S. around this time, and which FRETILIN had also claimed were in use. Until then, as I observed, Indonesian forces were using World War II -vintage propellor-driven bombers. In 1977 Denis Reichle saw newly-purchased French helicopters in action against FRETILIN. Holland has redently sold Indonesia two corvettes, and Great Britain this year negotiated a sale of Hawk counter-insurgency aircraft.

While existing UN resolutions do not extend to an arms embargo, these sales clearly violate their spirit. A recommendation to embargo weapons which could be used in East Timor would be a step towards rendering present resolutions meaningful.

Portugal, which is now a member of the Security Council, has constantly expressed its hope of assisting in a solution to the Timor problem. In early 1976 Portugal called the Security Council together over East Timor. The situation today is no less a threat to regional security, especially considering guerilla resistance and Indonesian military activity in neighbouring West Irian, which is destabilising the border with Papua New Guinea.

Finally, Mr Chairman,

It must be obvious that the East Timorese have demonstrated their will to independence. They have waged what must be one of the most heroic resistance efforts in modern history, in horrifying circumstances. Above all, they have been robbed of political freedom. Surely, after four years, their voices deserve to be heard.

Lest my remarks be misinterpreted, I would like to state here my deepest respect for the people and culture of Indonesia, which is totally consistent with support for the UN resolutions on East Timor. The war has brought dishonour on the government of Indonesia in the international community, just as the dubious role of my own government as an accomplice to the invasion has brought dishonour on Australia. It is in the real interests of Indonesia to withdraw from East Timor and to build genuine ties of friendship with the people of Timor and Australia. Only then can we speak of a lasting regional security based on mutual self-respect between three independent and honourable nations.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.